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NEWS CONFERENCE

OF

HONORABLE ROBERT S. McNAMARA
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

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THE PENTAGON

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Thursday, August 6, 1964

5:00 P. M.

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SECRETARY McNAMARA: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen: I have four brief announcements to make, after which I will endeavor to answer your questions.

First, there have been no further enemy attacks on our vessels operating in the Gulf of Tonkin since I spoke to you last night.

Secondly, the routine patrol of our destroyers operating in that gulf, in the area shown on this map, between Hainan Island and the coast of North Viet Nam, has been resumed.

Thirdly, the preliminary analysis of the photo reconnaissance taken following our strikes yesterday tends to confirm the damage assessment which I reported to you yesterday morning. You recall that at that time, I stated our aircraft striking the bases of the patrol boats at Hon Gay, Loc Chao, Phuc Loi, Quang Khe had destroyed or damaged approximately twenty-five of the torpedo boats; that in addition, our aircraft striking at the petroleum storage dump at Vinh, in support of the patrol boats, had destroyed 90 percent of that storage dump.

At Vinh is located about 10 percent of the petroleum storage capacity of North Viet Nam. The additional information brought out by the photo-reconnaissance analyses is that in addition, we destroyed approximately seven of the anti-aircraft installations at Vinh.

(MORE)

Fourthly, I have asked Admiral McDonald to award the Navy Unit Citation to the men of the ships and aircraft participating in the operation, both in recognition of their bravery and also in recognition of the effectiveness of their operations. Admiral McDonald has enthusiastically agreed with that recommendation and is taking steps to put it into effect.

Now I will be happy to try to answer your questions.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, does our Government have any information from the North Vietnamese Government through diplomatic channels about the possible prisoner?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: No, we have not received any such information, but we are taking steps to endeavor to obtain his release, if he has been captured, as has been alleged by them.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, Radio Hanoi claims that North Viet Nam shot down eight attacking U. S. planes Wednesday and damaged three others.

SECRETARY McNAMARA: I think this is typical of the veracity of their reports. We lost two aircraft, as I reported to you yesterday, one an A-4, which is a jet attack aircraft, Naval aircraft, and the other an A-1, which is a propeller driven Naval aircraft, both operating off the carriers TICONDEROGA and CONSTELLATION. In addition, there was minor damage to two other aircraft, both of which returned safely.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, do you have any information over the last four days that would indicate the Chinese Communists made any military efforts to assist or respond with the North Vietnamese, to respond to our attacks?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: No, I have no information that the Communist Chinese in any way assisted the North Vietnamese in their attacks on our vessels. I think it probable that the Communist Chinese will introduce some combat aircraft into North Vietnam in support of them. As I told you before, North Vietnam does not possess any combat aircraft of its own.

(MORE)

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you say you think it is highly probable. Does that mean you already have indications?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: No, I have no indication of it, but I would think that that would be a likely response.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, have you had any word one way or another that there has been a third incident of any kind as claimed by Radio Hanoi?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: No, we have no indication of any third incident. There have been no attacks or hostile actions directed toward our vessels operating in the gulf. I explained to you yesterday that our routine patrol is functioning in this area (indicating) and moving South. We have two carriers, the TICONDEROGA and the CONSTELLATION, in approximately this position (indicating). They, in turn, are escorted by destroyers. There have been no attacks or reported attacks or attempted attacks at any of the vessels operating in that area.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, have there been any incidents that you know of involving the South Vietnamese vessels and North Vietnamese?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: No, none that I know of, although I think I should mention to you the South Vietnamese Naval Patrol activities that are carried on to prevent the infiltration of men and materiel from the North into the South. In the last seven months of 1961, for example, about 1400 men were infiltrated across the 17th parallel from North Viet Nam into South Viet Nam. To prevent further infiltration of that kind, the South Vietnamese, with our assistance, have set up a naval patrol which is very active in that area, which continues to inspect and examine junks and their personnel. In one 8-month period that I can recall they discovered 140 Viet Cong infiltrators.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, there have been reports about considerable troop movements by U.S. aircraft in South Viet Nam to the 17th parallel. Could you give us an assessment about those?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: We have, to the best of my knowledge, moved no South Vietnamese troops nor have we moved U.S. troops into South Viet Nam. We have, as I reported to you yesterday, moved interceptor aircraft into South Viet Nam to be prepared for whatever eventuality develops. We have, in addition, moved certain fighter aircraft into South Viet Nam. We moved certain fighter aircraft into Thailand. We made reinforcements of our advance bases in the Pacific; reinforcements moved out of the United States for that purpose. We have moved certain fleet units; I mentioned the attack carrier group moving from the First Fleet, which is homed in Pacific waters off the Pacific Coast, out into the Western Pacific, and we also moved an anti-submarine task group down into the South China Sea, this in order to provide protection to our carriers and destroyers operating in these waters, both in the Gulf and in these waters South of Hainan Island.

(More)

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, could you tell us why you think it is highly probable that the Chinese will move planes into North Viet Nam?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: As they have no combat aircraft of their own, I would assume that they would make such a request and that it would be answered.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, the Nationalist Chinese reported rather large troop movements on the mainland through the province of Yunann. Is there any indication that there was a large-scale Communist --

SECRETARY McNAMARA: We have no indication that there have been any substantial movements of Communist Chinese forces either by land or air.

QUESTION: In the months preceeding ...

SECRETARY McNAMARA: I am speaking now of the recent past, the last few days. I know of no large movements of the kind you suggested, for that matter, during the past several months.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, it has been some 48 hours now since that first attack. In studying the situation further, have you arrived at any answer to the mystery of why this was done?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: No, I can offer no explanation. We considered a number of alternative explanations, but it would be sheer speculation on my part to express them to you, and I think it would be better not to do so.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you said that the South Vietnamese patrols which are inspecting junks were set up with United States assistance. Could you tell us what form that assistance took?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Yes. At the time we began the expanded program of assistance to South Vietnam in December 1961, at which time we analyzed in some detail the extent of infiltration during the previous six months. It was on that basis that I reported to you the very extensive infiltration that took place then. We concluded the best form of prevention would be the establishment of a junk patrol. To that end, we provided the funds necessary to construct about 500 junks. These fall into four categories: Command junks, which are motorized, carry a crew of about ten men, are armed with automatic weapons, equipped with radios; motorized sailor junks, which are also armed, which patrol the coasts; sailing junks, which act as picket ships to carry out surveillance of particular areas; and motor junks, without sails. This force of some 500 junks was constructed in the shipyards of South Vietnam, equipped with engines, in some cases, supplied from this country, and generally financed by the Military Assistance Program of this country,

QUESTION: And they operate on their own?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: They operate on their own. They are part of the South Vietnamese Navy, commanded by the South Vietnamese Navy, operating in the coastal waters inspecting suspicious incoming junks, seeking to deter and prevent the infiltration of both men and materiel from North Vietnam into South Vietnam.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, do these junks go North, into North Vietnam waters?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: They have advanced closer and closer to the 17th parallel, and in some cases I think have moved beyond that in an effort to stop the infiltration closer to the point of origin.

QUESTION: Do our Naval vessels afford any cover for these junks in those operations?

(MORE)

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Our Naval vessels afford no cover whatsoever. Our Naval personnel do not participate in the junk operations.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, if the North Vietnamese are holding an American pilot, does it appear that it is your Lt. Alvarez?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: There is some indication that if they hold one of our pilots, it is he.

QUESTION: What are the indications?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: We believed that he bailed out of his aircraft. There was an indication from the automatic beeper attached to a parachute that he did so.

QUESTION: What sort of status does a man like this have and what steps can be taken?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: He is a captive of war and we would seek through neutral channels to obtain his release. Whether we are successful in doing so, I don't know, but we are bringing to bear every possible pressure to that end.

I have time for one more question, gentlemen.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, you said the destroyer patrol had been resumed in the Gulf of Tonkin. Was it broken off?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: It was broken off during the attack upon it in the darkness the night before last and, of course, during the action of yesterday it was also broken off. But it has been resumed and will continue until completed some time later this week or early next.

QUESTION: Sir, --

SECRETARY McNAMARA: Thank you.

One question.

QUESTION: -- are the reinforcements semi-permanent? In other words, if there is no additional incident in a week or two weeks, will these planes start coming back?

SECRETARY McNAMARA: The reinforcements will stay in position as long as required.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. Secretary.